

New Zealand and the Sea: Historical Perspectives (Bridget Williams Books, 2018)
Chapter 10: Waterfronts and Homes, 1900–1970
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When Kevin Ford was a child in the 1940s, his father worked as a watersider in Bluff. Each morning Kevin or his brother would get up early and walk up the road until they could see the harbour. If there was a ship in port their father would get up and go to work; if there was no ship he would sleep in.¹ For most of the twentieth century, the vast majority of goods that came in or out of New Zealand were loaded and unloaded by watersiders like Kevin Ford's father. Despite technological advances, the activities around shipping and ports were still shaped by the unpredictable oceanic environment, and as the Fords' story demonstrates, the effects of the sea's unpredictability did not stop at the port gate. Watersiders' family members and their domestic spaces were equally influenced by the uncertain conditions of waterside labour and the broken rhythms of the global seaborne trade upon which New Zealand relied.

The waterfront has been key to New Zealand's economy and its relationship with the outside world, and it has received historical attention commensurate with this importance. Anna Green argued that it was the nature of waterfront work that caused the intense struggle for control between capital and labour on the waterfront in the first half of the twentieth century; her analysis is detailed and persuasive.² Green and others have also examined the waterfront as a homosocial workplace and the impact of that workplace on New Zealand's relationship with the sea, but this work has largely focused on the waterfront as its own world.³

This chapter develops previous work by moving beyond the port gates and exploring the relationship between workers' homes and the loading and unloading of ships. The first half of the chapter examines the domestic residential patterns of waterfront workers, and the second explores the demands that waterfront work made on watersiders' family life and vice versa.

To explore the relationship between men's paid work and their homes and families is to stand in the shadow of an immense theoretical and political debate. In the 1970s and early 1980s, Marxist feminist historians attempted to fit women's unpaid labour into a Marxist economic framework. Janet Finch used case studies to show that in a wide range of industries a woman's work was incorporated into her husband's job. Her framework was an important way of understanding such work, but made the relationship appear unidirectional.⁴ Historians of coal mining have demonstrated the usefulness of exploring the relationship between home life and a specific workplace: the environment shaped miners' homes as well as their work, and the image of miners' wives constantly cleaning homes full of coal dust recurs in discussions of the mining industry. Union demands for pithead baths were thus an industrial demand with a domestic purpose.⁵ This chapter builds on the environmental observations of mining history to explore the relationship between waterfront work and domestic spaces.

Historians of the gendered labour of the maritime world have demonstrated the impact of the sea's instability and uncertainty. Margaret Hunt discussed the wives of men in the British Royal Navy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and showed the wide range of strategies these women developed to navigate the unpredictability of their husband's wages and the timing of his return to shore.⁶ The strategies were different in early-twentieth-century Sydney waterfront communities, but Margo Beasley's discussion of gender, work and housing demonstrated that mitigating uncertainty was still central to the way families organised,⁷ and Pat Ayers described both the material and cultural effects of the insecurity of dock work in her account of mid-twentieth-century Liverpool.⁸ Together, these studies – although focused on different centuries and different hemispheres – show the importance of looking beyond the narrow physical boundary of the waterfront to better grasp the social and cultural significance of cargo-handling and shipboard work. They usefully frame the following discussion of waterfronts and homes in twentieth-century New Zealand.

WATERSIDERS' RESIDENTIAL PATTERNS

Kevin Ford's family rented a house that ensured his father would only have to walk a short distance to work and that enabled a child to tell him whether he was working that day or not. One of the most fundamental ways that waterfront labour shaped domestic spaces was in determining where watersiders and their families lived. Ships did not arrive in port on a regular or consistent schedule, and the resultant fluctuating demand for labour to handle their cargoes determined the composition of residential neighbourhoods near New Zealand ports. This section will start by exploring port neighbourhoods in New Zealand's largest cities, and then go on to look at residential patterns in smaller towns.

Until the 1930s, waterfront work was casual. When a ship arrived in port, men would be hired to unload its cargo, and their job was complete when the ship was reloaded with new cargo. The number of jobs available depended on the number of ships in port. Waterside workers could not afford to pay to travel to the port when there was no guarantee they would get work once they arrived, so it made sense to live close by. In the biggest cities, this meant living in the inner-city suburbs of Freemans Bay and Ponsonby in Auckland, or Thorndon in Wellington. For watersiders' families, living in these areas was a convenient but far-from-ideal residential situation. Pat Ayers has argued that the demand for accommodation near the Liverpool docks contributed to poor housing, and the same seems to be true in New Zealand suburbs.⁹ The accommodation that watersiders and other working-class families could afford was often poorly maintained. For example, a 1951 report about Freemans Bay described many homes that were not waterproof and had inadequate water supplies.¹⁰ Landlords whose property was close to the port could be sure of renting out their houses whether or not they maintained them.

The clustering of watersiders and their families in the same suburbs provided opportunities to challenge poor living conditions. Freemans Bay, in particular, had a long tradition of both self-help organisations and protest.¹¹ Johnny Mitchell, a

watersider until 1951, spent considerable time as part of the Freemans Bay Welfare committee, trying to get substandard housing fixed or tenants rehoused.¹² In Wellington this kind of community building can be seen in Bill O'Reilly's campaign for mayor of Thorndon. This was an informal position and votes cost a penny a piece, raising funds for blind children. In 1955 O'Reilly won almost half of the 50,390 votes cast, because he was endorsed by the watersiders.¹³ Watersiders' residential patterns were a response to the unpredictability of waterfront work; in turn those patterns enabled a range of collective strategies to make it easier to live on low wages and insecure work.

Over the course of the twentieth century, changes to industrial conditions and to cities and ports meant that watersiders moved further out to a wider range of residential areas. In the first half of the century, as watersiders' demands for more secure hours were met, they could afford to live much further from the port.¹⁴ In addition, widely available public transport expanded the areas of a city that were easily commutable. By 1951, watersiders lived across Auckland – approximately fifty watersiders near each 'dot' on the map (Figure 10.1).¹⁵ In the new post-war suburbs in Auckland, watersiders were dispersed among a larger general population. While watersiders were moving to new suburbs, cities were growing faster than their ports. Wellington had a reasonably steady union membership of between 1,500 and 2,000 watersiders throughout this period, while the city's overall population almost tripled. In Auckland, the number of watersiders increased, but the city's population increased at a much faster pace than the waterfront workforce.¹⁶ After the Second World War the domestic patterns of watersiders varied significantly. Some lived in inner-city neighbourhoods, while others lived in new suburbs or in state houses that had been pepper-potted into wealthier areas.¹⁷ Watersiders' living patterns became less distinct and more dispersed.

In Auckland and Wellington, watersiders' families could disperse into the wider population because these were cities with ports, but not *port cities*. By international standards no New Zealand city was a port city. Richard Lawton gave two possible approaches: "The extent to which places may be described categorically as "ports" is problematic. Two approaches may be suggested: first, in terms of the relative importance to their economies of trade and shipping; secondly, in terms of port-related economic activities."¹⁸ For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, almost all New Zealand cities and towns had a port. Therefore each port served only one urban area and the rest of their hinterland was rural. The frequency of ports in New Zealand towns and cities meant that a port was less significant to any individual town's economy or population.¹⁹ At the time of the 1911 census, just 2 per cent of the population of Auckland or Wellington were waterside workers, and that number fell over the following decades.²⁰ Rather than talking about a port city in Auckland and Wellington, then, it is more useful to think of port *suburbs*, at least early in the twentieth century.

While New Zealand did not have any port cities, sometimes the distance between an urban area and its port created a port settlement. Lyttelton was 10 kilometres from Christchurch, Port Chalmers was 15 kilometres from Dunedin, and Bluff was

25 kilometres from Invercargill. The economy and population of each of these settlements was centred around the ports. In the 1940s, 200 men worked on the wharf in Bluff – 10 per cent of the town's residents. Port Chalmers had a similar number of waterside workers to Bluff.²¹ Lyttelton was a little different because the port soon outgrew the settlement, and from the 1920s a significant proportion of waterside workers lived in Christchurch and commuted by train.²² This did not affect the port orientation of Lyttelton, but did mean that the domestic spaces occupied by workers spread out beyond the port from very early on. These settlements were small; Lyttelton had a population of around 3,000 from the 1920s, and Bluff and Port Chalmers both grew to that size by the 1960s.²³ These port settlements were the only places in New Zealand where the economy was defined by the port.

The ports at provincial centres – New Plymouth, Nelson, Gisborne, Timaru, Whanganui and Whāngārei – primarily exported agricultural commodities from the places where they were produced.²⁴ The existence of a harbour that was suitable for a port was one of the reasons each of these towns had become a provincial centre. Although goods were discharged at ports in these towns, their primary purpose was to facilitate an export industry.²⁵ Port work in provincial centres reflected seasons, harvests and the less stable rhythms of the sea. For instance, in April 1924, Timaru port workers were without work because of a poor harvest. The union's Timaru branch reported to *Transport Worker*, the union newsletter:

The weather all through the spring and summer was such that the ground could not produce – hot, drying winds; cold, drying winds, and no rain. The result: Harvest is past, threshing all done, the grain is mostly in store fully two months ahead of time, and the quantity is not one-half the ordinary ... All this means that very little labour has been used or will be used in connection with these industries, and work on the waterfront must suffer as the goods are not here to be shipped.²⁶

The patterns of rural production shaped port work and port workers. However, the other functions of a provincial centre were more important to the economy and urban development. In most provincial towns, watersiders were around 1 per cent of the total population.²⁷ Watersiders in these areas still lived near the ports and dominated certain streets, but made up only a tiny fraction of a town with a much larger function.²⁸

Smaller ports served a much narrower purpose. The West Coast ports of Greymouth and Westport were a function of the coal industry. Likewise, Tokomaru Bay and Pātea served the freezing works that grew up there.²⁹ Often watersiders made up a bigger percentage of the workforce in these areas than in the provincial settlements. In 1911 there were twenty-one members of the watersiders' union in Tokomaru Bay, out of a population of 919 (5 per cent of the population). Similarly in Greymouth, 5 per cent of the population were members of its watersiders' union.³⁰ However, here ports were a function of the dominant industry in that town and

therefore did not shape it.

Residential patterns affected how watersiders, individually and collectively, responded under pressure. The period immediately after the Second World War was a time of heightened tensions between employers and watersiders. Negotiations over wages broke down in February 1951, and employers locked out waterside workers. After five months, watersiders capitulated, the union was defeated and many never worked on the wharf again. In general, watersiders were much more unified during the 1951 lockout if they lived in areas dominated by other watersiders. In Port Chalmers no one worked as a strikebreaker until the whole branch decided to go back in June.³¹ In Lyttelton, there was a contrast between the actions of watersiders who lived in the port settlement itself and those who lived in Christchurch. Approximately half of those who lived outside of Lyttelton remained part of the lockout until the end, while about 90 per cent of those who lived in Lyttelton did the same.³² Watersiders who worked in mid-sized ports in agricultural centres were isolated because they were such a small part of the economy. Frank McNulty, a Lyttelton watersider who travelled around the South Island during the lockout, described the dynamic in ports in agricultural districts: 'in a place like Oamaru ... there's only a very small section [of watersiders] right in the middle of the farming community. The watersiders' kids couldn't go to school, the watersiders' wives were being yelled at and abused in the streets.'³³ In contrast, in Greymouth and Westport – both coal towns – nobody worked as a strikebreaker on the wharf throughout the entire dispute.³⁴ The community that had been built in this mining town was solidly union, and to cross a picket line was not acceptable behaviour. Watersiders' ability to build communities that enabled them to take industrial action and therefore reshape their work was affected by both the unpredictability of the sea and the larger urban area they were part of.

SHIPS AND HOMES – HOMES AND SHIPS

Kevin Ford's early morning trips to see if his father had work that day exemplified just one of many ways that waterfront work required domestic labour. Waterfront work did not stop at the port gate, but involved family members and domestic spaces. Each day that a watersider had work, he left home, travelled to the ship he was working on, and used his body to move cargo. This was often hard, relentless physical labour. When a watersider returned home each day he might be injured, covered in coal dust, or carrying a decent-sized pay packet. Any of these outcomes would affect his home and the people living in it. Waterfront work shaped domestic spaces, but the reverse was also true: watersiders attempted to change their work to better meet the needs of their homes. This section is organised around the movement of watersiders between home and work. The effects on domestic life of dirty, exhausting and risky labour were not unique to the waterfront, but the fickle nature of the sea made waterfront work unpredictable.

Until the 1930s, waterside work was organised on a ship-by-ship basis and watersiders were only needed when there were ships in port for them to unload. When a ship docked, the foreman selected waterside workers to unload and load

that ship, and those workers continued until the transfer of cargo was completed and the ship left port. In the 1940s the New Zealand Waterfront Workers' Union (NZWWU) instituted an overtime ban as part of its long-running campaign for more secure hours.³⁵ The overtime ban held ships in port longer than they would have been otherwise, as watersiders worked up to nineteen fewer hours each week. Watersiders' ability to hold ships in port hampered shipowners' efforts to structure work in ways that returned ships to the sea quickly and at a low cost. In February 1947 the NZWWU won a guaranteed wage scheme at all but the smallest ports.³⁶ This guaranteed wage fundamentally changed the nature of waterfront work. From 1947 Kevin Ford would not have had to go and check if a ship was in, as his father would forfeit the guaranteed wage if he did not go to work.

The flip side of casualisation was that sometimes the hours of work were long. Shipowners wanted their ships at sea, not languishing at port. In the 1940s, in Lyttelton and Auckland, watersiders worked an average of fifty hours a week.³⁷ In 1936 the NZWWU had tried to get new legislation establishing a forty-hour week applied to waterfront work, but the Arbitration Court ruled against them, accepting ship owners' arguments that Saturday work was necessary, and that the uneven nature of waterfront work made the waterfront an exceptional workplace.³⁸ Following this ruling, overtime continued to be a contentious issue. The NZWWU was particularly frustrated when the Waterfront Industry Commission (WIC) denied their 1949 claim for a wage increase, because the high level of necessary overtime allowed watersiders to earn a comparatively good income: 'The supreme irony of the situation is that [watersiders'] penal rates are used against them and quoted as their normal wages.'³⁹ Watersiders' unions fought for more regular hours, rather than watersiders coming and going from port to serve the whims of the shipping companies.

In busy times and busy ports, watersiders were more successful in addressing the number of hours they worked through informal resistance than through negotiation. For instance, in Lyttelton the 9.15 p.m. train to Christchurch – which men working overtime until 9 p.m. might be expected to catch – was referred to as a 'ghost train'.⁴⁰ Men left work early and caught the 8.20 p.m. train instead, thereby reaching their homes almost an hour earlier. Workers also claimed time from work through 'spelling', the process whereby some watersiders within a work gang took time off while other members of the work gang covered for them. Hour-about spelling was most common, but some groups organised spelling on a week-about basis. Discussions of spelling, both contemporary and historical, have focused on its effect on the port work culture and as a response to the physical strain of waterfront work, but spelling also affected life outside the port gate. It could be a way of making the workplace conform to the need for a watersider's labour at home. Some watersiders spelled each other for a week at a time and used the week to dig their gardens, or build or maintain their houses.⁴¹

The insecurity of hours on the waterfront shaped the patterns of domestic labour of women as well as men. Watersiders generally needed food when they came home, which required labour from women. Some watersiders travelled from home to work

just once each day, while others travelled backwards and forwards up to three times a day for meals.⁴² A woman who cooked for a watersider did not always know when he would arrive home and require food, and her domestic labour was necessary in order for him to work in the port. The union explicitly used the experiences of watersiders' family members to criticise the long, unpredictable hours of work on the waterfront. The NZWWU used a fictional 'Mr Hall', a returned serviceman, to put their claims about hours of work to the public. They said of his wife: 'Mrs. Hall does not know whether he will be home for meals.'⁴³

Workers' bodies connected their home and the waterfront, but loading and unloading ships endangered workers' bodies. On the night of 9 January 1914, William Cole was working on the Gisborne waterfront. He was hurt by a sling full of railway sleepers, and died the following morning. He was married and had seven children.⁴⁴ An inquest was held and the jury blamed lack of proper lighting and misuse of equipment. They added: 'more care should be taken by officers in charge of vessels before discharging cargo at nighttime'.⁴⁵ Moving cargo from portside to ship was dangerous, and this accident, like so many on the wharf, was a result of tension between safe working conditions and the speedy unloading of ships. In the 1940s, three or four watersiders died each year as a result of workplace accidents,⁴⁶ while long hours of physical labour made non-fatal accidents and workplace injuries common. In 1950, the 250 workers at Port Chalmers recorded 90 accidents. Workers were most likely to injure their arms and legs, although descriptions of injuries also describe damage to workers' backs and testicles.⁴⁷

The Port Chalmers accident register recorded if an injured man was married and how many dependants he had.⁴⁸ Recording details of dependants in the accident register was an acknowledgement of how central a watersider's wage was to his family. Barbara Brookes describes the catastrophic situation that nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century families faced if they lost a breadwinner.⁴⁹ Any form of injury could threaten a family's financial well-being. One Auckland watersider, who was off work for a workplace injury for two years in 1949 and 1950, received £4-10-0 a week in compensation. This income was barely half of what he would have earned from a forty-hour week, and it put considerable stress on his family's finances.⁵⁰ Even after the 1938 social security legislation of the First Labour Government, breadwinners' health was central to a family's economic well-being.

The conflict between unloading ships speedily so they could return to the sea and unloading them safely so watersiders' bodies could return intact to their homes was a cause of ongoing tension in ports.⁵¹ In the face of dangerous work, watersiders' only response was to go on strike, thereby keeping the ship in port. Between 1945 and 1950, disputes over safety caused 22 per cent of all working hours lost to industrial conflict.⁵² The most high-profile dispute over safety in the immediate post-war period was the *Mountpark* dispute. The hold of the cargo vessel *Mountpark* was covered by large planks that were worn out and awkward to lift. Auckland waterside workers were dismissed after refusing to lift the hatches unless they could be bound together and lifted by a winch, which would be safer and more stable, but slower. Over the next few months, conflict over the safe loading of the

Mountpark continued. In August 1948 the watersiders won a legal ruling that protected their right to refuse unsafe work.⁵³ Through strike action, watersiders ensured that they would be able to use winches to lift the worn-out hatches, and because of that action the *Mountpark* remained in port longer than it would have. Moving goods from sea to land was dangerous and some ships were more dangerous than others; watersiders did what they could to mitigate this danger and protect their bodies.

As watersiders moved on and off ships and between the port and their homes each day, they carried things with them, some quite unintentionally. Watersiders who were unloading cement, lampblack (used to make tyres), coal or fertiliser came home with dust from the cargo in their clothes, on their bodies and in their hair. The tiny particles of these substances then got everywhere within their homes, and it was their wives or other female relatives who had the responsibility of cleaning the dirt. Lampblack was one of the most noxious substances on the waterfront and the NZWWU highlighted the burden placed on women:

I ask the Waterfront Industry Authority to take into consideration the hardship imposed on members' wives. Despite the number of baths the worker may have, this commodity, still coming out of the skin, soils linen, towels etc. in the home, but unfortunately in the minds of some, the worker's wife is expected to accept this without protest.⁵⁴

For most of the period pre-containerisation, laundry was hard physical work. Washing machines were not widely available until the 1950s and 1960s.⁵⁵ Getting coal dust, lampblack or other dirt out of work clothes added more work to a task that was already physically demanding. The domestic labour of washing clothes was a necessary, if largely invisible aftermath of the labour of transporting some types of goods from sea to shore, or shore to sea. Historians of coal mining have written about the relationship between women's laundry labour and men's work in the mines.⁵⁶ Two New Zealand sisters who both married coal miners had the following conversation during an oral-history interview about the Huntly Coalfields in 1992: 'Try to remind them about washday. Big day washday. Oh big day – with the copper going out – the copper to boil.' ... 'Took quite a while, because we had the rubbing boards in those days, you don't see them now, quite an antique now. And each lot of clothes had to be boiled. Rinsed.' ... 'He brought them home on Saturdays to wash. Yes he brought them home. Try to remind them.'⁵⁷ The repeated emphasis on reminding an imaginary audience, who would have had no experience of washing coal dust out of clothes, shows the women's desire for their labour to be recognised. Unlike a miner's wife, a watersider's wife's laundry work was unpredictable. She would only know her workload when her husband was employed to work a particular ship. If that ship was loading dirty cargo, then her washing day got longer and the work more arduous.

Disputes about dirty cargo were common, but they did not turn on whether or not the cargo would be eventually unloaded; by the time goods reached New

Zealand they had travelled a long way and they were needed. Instead, disputes were about how much shipping companies had to pay for cargo to be unloaded. These sorts of disagreements were common. In April 1925 the *Kakapo* ran into conflict in both Auckland and New Plymouth as watersiders wanted a higher rate for unloading guano. A few months later, Lyttelton watersiders refused to work another guano ship unless they were paid more.⁵⁸ A report in the *Transport Worker* described the experience of unloading badly packed guano:

No consideration whatever has been given to men who have to work in ships' holds discharging this cargo; it is usually packed in third or fourth-quality secondhand bags, and as the manure is of very dusty nature the result is that the men are breathing in the obnoxious dust arising in the hold all the time.⁵⁹

The same article described phosphate bags splitting while being lifted and phosphate raining down on workers below (see Figure 10.4).

From 1945 to 1950 the most common cause of industrial conflict on the waterfront was dirt money, paid as compensation for dirty cargo, particularly lampblack.⁶⁰ When union representatives met with the Minister of Labour they described the effect of lampblack not just on watersiders, but on their wives: 'one man, his wife got it into her skin through washing his overalls and her hands were infected, and the skin peeled right off'.⁶¹ The NZWWU demanded protective clothing, cleaning facilities, and substantial dirt money for workers who unloaded lampblack.⁶²

Watersiders mentioned the hard work of washing dirty clothes when making these demands for dirt money. However, there was a gap between the union's articulation of the problem and its solution. Dirt money did not lessen the work of washing. Theoretically that money could have been used to buy more towels and sheets, or to pay for laundry to be done elsewhere.⁶³ A new pair of sheets cost 35s in 1950, so fourteen hours of dirt money could have replaced one pair of sheets covered with lamp-black.⁶⁴ For those watersiders who were boarding or living in a hotel, their washing was already performed through a financial transaction. However, there was no guarantee that a watersider would pass dirt money on to the woman who was doing his laundry. The relationship between a watersider's wage and the family economy was not a direct one. In the 1940s Gwendolene Pawson's father gave his wife £5 every week, and kept any extras, including over-time and dirt money.⁶⁵ The relationship between domestic spaces and the sea was articulated through the watersider, and while strikes over dirt money were making demands that ships meet the needs of domestic spaces, their victory did not necessarily lighten domestic work.

As well as unintentionally carrying dirt, dust and grit between ship and home, watersiders carried their pay packet. Each week, every watersider was given his pay packet at the waterfront while he worked.⁶⁶ The amount of money in it varied depending on the cargo and number of hours he had worked. The cash remained with the watersider while he finished his work day. It remained with him if he went

to the pub or anywhere else after work, and it returned with him to wherever he slept. When he got home he had to part with some of his pay packet, although he may have spent some of it over the course of his journey there. If he was boarding he would pay his bill, and if he was living with family he would turn over some part of his wages to the woman who was responsible for the home economy. In their 1949 wage case to the WIC, the NZWWU argued:

The standard of life, the quality and quantity of food and clothing his family enjoys, the type of home and the social amenities to which the worker's family has access, the standard of education within reach of the worker's family, the recreation and cultural advancement of the family, are all determined by the worker's wage. It is an industrial condition which extends, one may say, over the entire 24 hours of the day; a condition which is not simply the sole concern of the worker himself – his wife and children are also concerned.⁶⁷

The pay packet impacted the watersider, his dependants and the wider community.

In 1901 the first waterside workers' award in Wellington fixed the base rate at 1s 3d an hour.⁶⁸ This remained the wage rate at the main ports until 1913, even though inflation eroded the value of wages.⁶⁹ For most of the next thirty-five years, a watersider's wage bought him less than it did in 1901. The only exception was straight after a wage increase in 1916, which gave watersiders ever-so-slightly more buying power than the original award.⁷⁰ Watersiders' wages, like those of other workers in New Zealand, jumped significantly with the wage order of 1937.⁷¹ From 1937 the real value of watersiders' wages fluctuated, but also steadily increased. With the March 1965 award, watersiders received 25 per cent more, in real terms, than they had in 1901.⁷²

The oral histories of William Dougherty and Robert Hannah, whose fathers worked on the waterfront in Dunedin, illustrated what these numbers meant to working-class families, even in the supposedly prosperous post-war period. Robert Hannah was born in 1941. He remembers going to the department store to get new clothes when he needed them: 'If clothes were needed Mum would just take me to town and get a new pair of shorts, or a shirt or something – shoes.'⁷³ Hannah's narrative would be familiar to historians looking for stories of post-war prosperity, but he lived in a family with two wage earners (his mother worked in Gregg's spices factory) and was an only child. William Dougherty described a very different childhood. His family, despite having three wage earners and four non-earners, was very far from enjoying post-war prosperity. When asked what he remembered about clothes from his childhood, Dougherty said: 'Hand-me-downs. Didn't get boots till I went to school – and that was a work of art – that was the first pair – had nothing up till then – then you wound up with boots.'⁷⁴ Dougherty's description of how he acquired clothing was not unusual for this period.⁷⁵ The NZWWU's claim that wages determined workers' families' standard of living was not quite true; wages were too low for that. Working-class women's labour, either in making and remaking clothes, or developing networks to acquire and distribute second-hand

clothing, was central to providing clothing for their children.⁷⁶ Maureen Fairey described her family's position as: 'We were really quite poor.'⁷⁷ It was Fairey's mother's labour that limited their deprivation, despite their poverty. Waterside workers' wages were unpredictable and inadequate to meet family needs in the consumer economy throughout much of this period, and women's labour was required.

Wage negotiations were not watersiders' only strategy to improve their standard of living. Some ships offered the opportunity for watersiders to bring goods home as well as wages. Some goods that were taken off ships, such as chocolates or whiskey, were consumed immediately, but more were destined for domestic spaces. Many of Anna Green's interviewees described the theft of food: 'blocks of cheese cut up with piano wire, or cans of peaches'.⁷⁸ One watersider described, in detail, a pair of red shoes that he brought home to his four-year-old daughter. He emphasised that his daughter was able to wear these shoes before they were for sale in the shops.⁷⁹ He was recalling the late 1940s, a time when not all watersiders were able to provide shoes for their children, but the commercial goods of post-war prosperity that were available for the rich would have begun to cross the waterfront more regularly. In this story, the shoes are a triumph because he was able to provide for his family in a way no other man could, no matter how wealthy. Green presented watersiders' theft as part of their battle for control at the port, but theft was not just about the workplace. Taking goods home from work was also about improving domestic spaces and the lives of those living in them.⁸⁰

CONCLUSION

The instability and unpredictability of shipping and the sea affected the relationship between port work and domestic spaces. A watersider did not know if he would get work, and if he did get work he did not know how dangerous or how dirty it would be, how much he would get paid or what opportunities there might be for taking goods from the ships home. Watersiders' wives did not know when their husbands would return, what state their clothes and bodies would be in, and what wages and goods they might bring with them. The male-dominated world of both ships and ports can mean that discussions of masculinity and homosocial worlds dominate historical discussions of the sea and ports. The very visible connection between men's work and the sea has often rendered women's labour invisible. In his chapter, Chris Brickell demonstrates one way that women were involved in maritime spaces, where the wharf was a site of encounter and exchange between young men and women. This chapter has argued that domestic spaces and women's work were shaped by the work of the port and in turn shaped the actions of watersiders, who could hold up ships through strikes and informal measures. This chapter has also developed previous scholarship on the New Zealand waterfront by showing that the most contentious issues were not just about the conditions of work on the wharf itself and its effects on labouring men, but the areas of waterfront work that most affected domestic spaces.

In the 1970s, container ships started arriving at New Zealand ports. This new

shipping system literally contained wharf work, separating workers and cargoes. No longer would coal dust or cheese travel home with watersiders. Ports in towns closed, and less labour was needed in port settlements or in ports in cities. The imprint that waterfront work had made on residential patterns shrank. In the last decades of the twentieth century, shipping's main impact on urban space was through withdrawal – as former wharves and sections of former wharves were abandoned or repurposed. In Auckland and Wellington, hotels and corporate headquarters were built where ships had been loaded and unloaded. The houses that watersiders had rented were bought by middle-class and wealthy people. In provincial areas, the change looked different, as there were not necessarily new activities and people to replace the old.

New technology could not stabilise the sea or eliminate environmental frictions, but it did make the loading and unloading of ships more predictable and so transformed the relationship between waterfront work and domestic spaces.⁸¹

- 1 Kevin Ford interview with Grace Millar, 13 February 2011, Families and the 1951 Waterfront Dispute Oral History Project.
- 2 Anna Green, *British Capital, Antipodean Labour: Working the New Zealand Waterfront, 1915–1951*, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2001.
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